2: Underhill E-5 (1931-1935)1939 NU28 Papago NU28

"The Keeper and the Sacred House go together. They were decreed in the beginning by Elder Brother" (2). Some thought that in very ancient times this Keeper was the only official. "He went to Elder Brother and got his directions. Then he came back and showed the people what to do" (20). "He went before them like a light. He was their teacher and their father" (40). "He got the Wise Speeches from Elder Brother himself" (4). He was, in fact, a priestly ruler, much like the cacique in the Rio Grande pueblos.

His principal duty was the handling of the fetish which gave the village rain and therefore life. This meant the care of the sacred house where the fetish was lodged on important occasions and, finally, the presiding over all meetings held there. In the earliest times, he lived in the ceremonial house and received the men there for meetings while his family slept. At present, he lives beside it and his wife keeps it clean.

The house was used for meetings both ceremonial and secular and, on such occasions, it was the Keeper's duty to make the fire (hence one of his titles) and then mount to the roof of his shade and summon the men. Sometimes he had younger men to perform both of these functions for him. He called meetings to decide on the dates of ceremonies and whenever the other officials, the war, hunt and game leaders, had communications to make. When the men assembled, he sat at the west of the house, facing the door and opened the meeting with a moral talk bidding them pay attention to what was to be said and use their best judgment.

He acted as priest in all the important local ceremonies held for rain, for growth and for cleansing of crops and must know the appropriate Wise Speeches for each occasion. One informant gave him perquisites which remind one most strongly of the Pueblo cacique. "He must not be bothered with quarrelling. The people used to till his land for him because he worked so hard in the ceremonies." Certainly his land is not tilled for him now, and I have known an old Keeper in actual want because even his young relatives neglected him.

Beside his priestly functions, the Keeper acted as a patriarchal advisor to the village. The importance we give to this duty must depend on whether we consider the secular governor a modern official or an old one. Certainly the reliance on some aged leader as a patriarch and almost a dictator to the village is a pronounced Papago custom. At present that leader is often the secular governor and we need to consider whether he has always had such functions or has taken them over from the priestly leader. In view of the frequent statements that the Keeper was once the only village head,